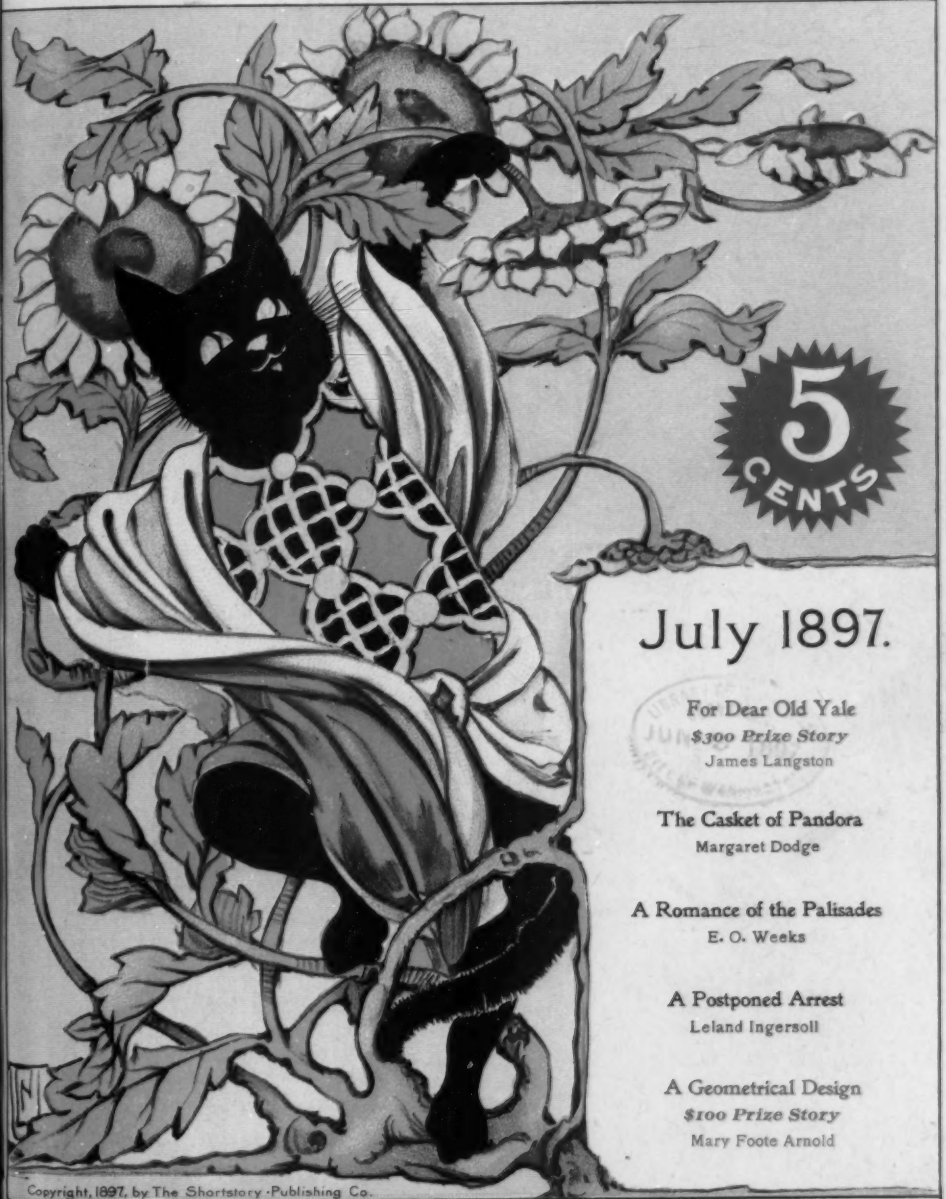
This number contains two of the $2,600 Prize Stories.

The Black Cat



July 1897.

For Dear Old Yale
$300 Prize Story
James Langston

The Casket of Pandora
Margaret Dodge

A Romance of the Palisades
E. O. Weeks

A Postponed Arrest
Leland Ingersoll

A Geometrical Design
$100 Prize Story
Mary Foote Arnold

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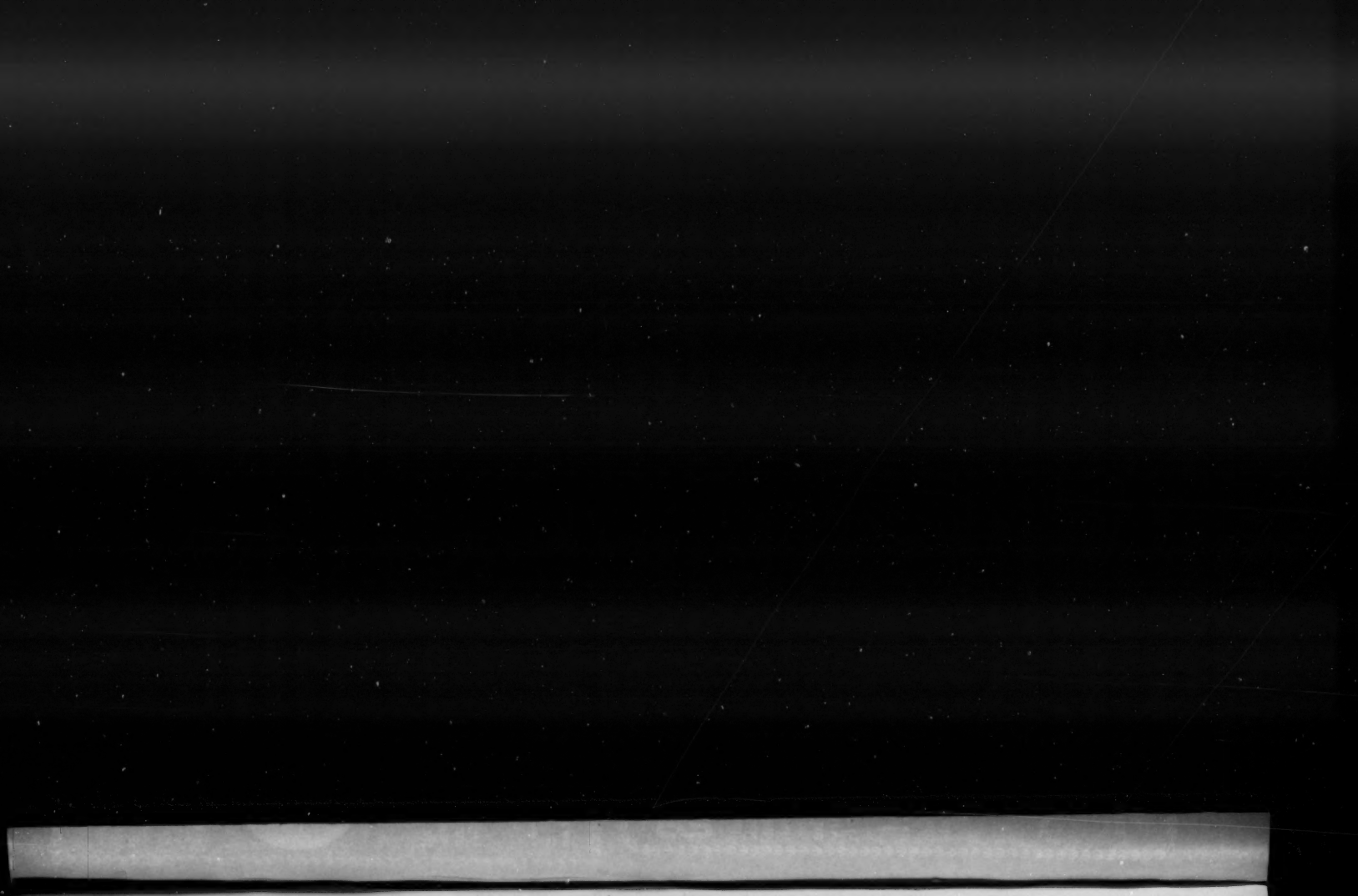

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The Black Cat

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For Dear Old Yale.*

BY JAMES LANGSTON.

IN a hundred towns along the upper waters of the Euphrates was sounding the steady lu-lu-lu of fanatical hordes slaughtering Christians. The Kurds were abroad, with battle cries of Islam on their lips, and the mercy of tigers in their hearts. The Turkish soldiery looked on stolidly at the butchery, sometimes helping it, though vowing with much talk that they were out for the defense. The Armenians simply died, as is their way, sometimes by tens, sometimes by thousands.

At the mission station five miles from Harput some Christians of a different type were gathered,— fighting Christians, who knew the uses of soap and gunpowder, and had a flag worth talking about to protect them, a flag with stripes on it and stars, that has been heard of in the world. Still this flag was far away and the Kurds were near.

There were men here and women, sheltered in a stone house with a stone wall around it, built by Ohio Presbyterians to show people who wear turbans how people who wear pot hats do such

*This story received the third prize, of $300, in THE BLACK CAT prize competition, which closed March 31, 1897.

things as preaching and decimal fractions. The women in the house were sure there was no danger; the men, excepting Professor Peabody, knew they would be lucky if they were not massacred to the last mother's child.

Gathered here in this mission station, and well content to have the stone wall around them, and shooting tackle within, were some twenty-five souls, six of them Americans, the rest natives of one breed or another who had accepted the story of Jesus and were suffering for it. There were half a dozen students from the Euphrates College, now a pile of smoldering ruins in Harput, earnest-eyed young men, who had fled from death with their Bibles and flowing trousers and their small black fezes. There were some Armenian girls and women, beautiful submissive creatures, born to be bought and sold, to suffer and die. There were three American ladies, two of them teachers from Constantinople, and one the wife of Father Asdadur, as he was called, the finest old missionary in all Asia Minor, and in charge of the station. Then there were two newly arrived missionaries, one with his bride, who had come from New England in service of the Board, and were pushing on to the East and wondering how far they would get. Finally, there was a man from Chicago who told "funny "stories and had great enterprise. He was a rug merchant who had journeyed inland for bargains in Daghestans and Cashmeres, and heartily wished he had stuck to the seaport bazaars.

Beyond doubt, the most learned member of this handful of Christians, and yet the most unwise, was Professor Walter Lathrop Sheffield Peabody (to give him all his names), a very famous man, whom Yale University had sent out to oversee some archæological excavations in the valley of the Euphrates. This they had done because Professor Peabody understood archæology as well as sociology, and Greek, and many other things. Indeed, he was Yale's bright, particular star, one of those men who are irritatingly brilliant. He had a wonderful memory, he was a wonderful whist player, he was a wonderful conversationalist, in fact he was fitted for nearly everything except dealing with Xeibeck chieftains, who, between you and me, care no more for a New Haven lion than they do for a Persian cat. The professor's folly had come on this very morning when he had fired a rifle

shot at a group of horsemen passing in the distance. To understand why he did this takes us back to the week before, when the company inside the mission walls had defended themselves as best they could, and fortunately with success, against some Kurdish stragglers who had conceived it a pleasant pastime to loot the place and kill the people in it, at least the men. And in this skirmish the versatile professor had come off less gloriously than was his wont; indeed, to tell plain truth, when he heard the bullets pattering about and the cries of the marauders, he had gone back into one of the inner rooms — and stayed there.

Fortunately the affair had turned out all right, thanks mainly to the lion fighting of young Eli Morris, a protégé of Peabody's and a notable in his own way at Yale, where it was said that no man had ever passed him on the football field, and no man had ever failed to pass him in the class room. Eli was on this archæological business because his father, who was rich, thought that a year or so abroad with Professor Peabody would do the boy worlds of good and incidentally keep him out of mischief. Not that Eli needed watching, for a finer fellow than he never took a Yale A. B. and marveled when he got it. And no dog ever loved its master better than he loved the professor; there was something pathetic in his attitude of humility toward this resplendent man of learning, in whom he saw everything that was good and great, while he, well, he was only Eli Morris. Yet, in this business with the Kurds the professor had been unmistakably nervous, while Eli was down at the gate treating the screaming devils as if they were some scrub eleven trying to score against the 'Varsity.

And the memory of this rankled in Peabody's mind, for he had the habit of excelling all men in all things, and it was bitter to his self-esteem to have a man who had been dropped through two or three classes outshine him in a time of crisis. So, on this day, when he espied some horsemen passing in the distance, he picked up his rifle very quietly and, before any one could stop him, fired a chance shot at long range. He would show these people that he was on the alert for danger, and, if he happened to hit any one, why, so much the better. This might not have been such a bad idea, at least no harm would have come of it, if the horsemen had been Kurds, as the professor supposed. But it chanced that they

were a Xeibeck band, the fiercest and most lawless tribe in all Kurdistan, and they cared neither for God nor Sultan, and boasted that they cut down Mussulmans and Christians with equal delight. This was the target Professor Peabody had chosen for the display of his marksmanship and the bolstering up of his pride.

"You don't think you hit any one, do you, professor?" asked Father Asdadur anxiously.

"I don't know," answered the professor; "I adjusted my globe sight very carefully, and am usually a fair judge of distance." He spoke as if his skill of the hand was alone in question, and took the same tone he would have used in arguing about a cut-stroke in tennis. "If we must fight anyhow, we may as well take the aggressive," he continued; but he did not exactly mean this, he simply objected to the old missionary's manner. The old missionary, however, had lived along the upper waters of the Euphrates for over fifteen years. He had seen Xeibecks before.

"God help us," he muttered, "if he did hit one of them."

All through the afternoon stragglers reached the station, the weak flying from the strong, and some of them were wounded, and all brought tales of horror, — of houses burned, of stores pillaged, of people killed and outraged. About sundown, while the ladies were dressing for dinner, there came to the house a messenger, a huge, bearded man, with cunning, squint eyes set in the face of a patriarch, and he talked for awhile to Father Asdadur in a sing-song voice, and then went away. When the missionary came in his face looked graver than usual, and he took Morris aside and told him that which made him look grave, too.

"We will call the men together after dinner," said Father Asdadur, "and give them the sheikh's message."

"Wait till the evening's over," said Eli; "the ladies have arranged some games and things."

Meantime Professor Peabody was pointing out to the ladies, in his happiest way, the picturesque points in the messenger's costume, — his gaudily embroidered garment of skin, his knotted turban, his queer leggings and trousers, — and was arguing with the rug man as to whether he was a Kurd or not.

"Was that fellow a Kurd, Father Asdadur?" he asked, when the man had gone.

"No, he was a Xeibeck."

"There, I was sure of it. You see, I have made a careful study of these tribal characteristics."

The evening passed delightfully, so the ladies declared, and Professor Peabody was the soul of the occasion. He was charming in serious talk, forceful in argument, abundant in epigram and clever mots, and even condescended to old-fashioned conundrums for the delectation of the Constantinople teachers, who, having spent their lives away from New Haven, had never heard a ramrod described as "my first is a kind of butter, my second a kind of liquor, and my whole a part of a gun," and other brilliant riddles of the sort. And then they sang college songs and plantation melodies, and one of the ladies made much fun of Eli's bass, which, she declared, invariably went up when it should have gone down, and *vice versa*. Indeed, Eli made a poor enough showing except when the professor got him to tell how, on a certain Thanksgiving day, when he was playing right tackle for Yale, he bucked his way through Princeton's whole rush line and made sixty yards for a touch-down, thus saving the game. But the story was half spoiled in the telling, for he jumbled it all together and failed to make impressive pauses, as good storytellers do. The professor would have been much better — at telling the story.

"What a pity Mr. Morris hasn't more brains," whispered one of the school teachers to Professor Peabody.

"Ah, but he has a good heart!" said the professor complacently.

"And he is so handsome and brave, isn't he?"

"Ye-es, I suppose he is," said Peabody, less complacent now.

After it was all over and the ladies had rustled away to bed, Father Asdadur brought the men together around a table on which were things to smoke. Then he announced very quietly that the Xeibeck sheikh had sent word that his band would attack the mission station at sunrise unless a white Christian, one of their number, be delivered over to be shot.

At this there were exclamations from all the men except Morris, who, as he knew it all beforehand, merely sat still with his long legs crossed, and puffed away at his pipe.

"This is an outrage, it is infamous!" said Professor Peabody,

and was launching into a pretty speech when the old missionary interrupted: "This is a country, sir, of outrages and infamy."

"But we are American citizens; the Sultan must protect us."

"The Sultan is powerless, and four days' marching could scarcely bring troops here. The Xeibecks will be at our gates when the sun comes up; they keep their appointments."

"But there must be some way of reasoning with this sheikh; we can make it worth his while, let him name a ransom."

Father Asdadur shook his head. "You do not know the Xeibecks. They come out of the mountains east of Smyrna, they live on bread and olives, and sleep in black tents. What would they do with your ransom? They want but one thing, blood for blood. One of their men was killed by one of our bullets; they insist that one of our men shall be killed by one of theirs."

All eyes were fixed on the professor, who stirred uneasily.

"Gentlemen," said he, after a troubled pause, "I suppose I am responsible for this catastrophe. I probably fired the shot — "

"Not so sure about that," put in Morris. "I popped away at our friends two or three times, myself, this afternoon."

Every man in the room, with one possible exception, felt that this statement was false, and knew also why Morris had made it. Perhaps the professor thought it was true; at any rate, he made no sign. "Yes," went on Eli in a matter-of-fact tone, "I thought maybe it would scare 'em away to see we were not afraid."

"Exactly my idea," said the professor, "Why can't we defend ourselves the way we — way we — did the other day?"

The professor flushed as he remembered that other day.

"My friends," said Father Asdadur, with deep impressiveness, "I've lived in this region a long time, and understand its ways. In my time I have seen massacres. I saw Heghgate burned, and the butcheries of Erzrum. My mother and my two sisters were killed at Hedink, my uncle and four cousins were killed at Trebizond. I know whereof I speak! The Xeibecks are the fiercest fighters in Syria, and they outnumber us ten to one. We might hold out against them an hour or two, not longer. After that you know what will happen." He glanced toward the stairway, whence the sound of laughter and women's talk floated down. Each man looked his neighbor in the eyes; they understood.

"This is horrible!" exclaimed one of the younger missionaries, a pale-faced graduate of a theological seminary, who had come out only the year before. His wife was one of the women upstairs.

"See here," said Morris abruptly, putting down his pipe, "there's no use trying to dodge this thing; there are twenty-five people here to be saved, and one of us six has got to do it." There was such conviction in his tone that the others felt the uselessness of further talk; even Professor Peabody was silent.

It is an interesting time when six men sit down together to agree calmly which one of them shall stop living. It was now one o'clock in the morning, the sun rose at five, they had four hours in which to decide. One of them had four hours to live.

"Do you all accept the sheikh's terms?" asked Father Asdadur after a long pause.

One after another the men accepted.

"Then I propose that we make the choice by lot."

There was another long silence.

"Gentlemen," said Morris, blowing out clouds of smoke, "I've been thinking of something. I believe I know why I was sent to this God-forsaken country. I never did know until now. I think I'm the man to meet these beggars in the morning. I don't see any sense in drawing lots. Look at it sensibly, now; you five men are all doing something worth while, helping somebody, making the world better. I've never done a thing except give the governor trouble, and blow in his money, and get dropped and suspended, and get myself laughed at, and — and" (with a gulp) "kick football a little. Besides that, you're married men with families, but it don't matter a hang about me. So you'll please consider me nominated for this business in the morning."

It is doubtful if, in all his life, Eli had ever made so long a speech as this; it is certain he had never made such an impression. Father Asdadur reached across the table and clasped the young man's strong white hand in his brown, bony one.

"God bless you, my son," he said; "you have a brave heart, but the thing is impossible, quite impossible."

And all the others said it was impossible, too. What else could they say? So they came back to the lot-drawing idea, and the rug man proposed that cards should point the finger of fate.

"I never played cards in my life," said Father Asdadur.

"Neither did I," said one of the missionaries, but the other admitted having learned poker in his young manhood.

"Let it be poker, then," said the rug man, "cold hands with a draw. I'll show you in a jiffy. Look here, I deal you each five cards, like that;" — he produced a pack of cards from somewhere and began to shuffle them, — "understand, you have the privilege of drawing once, and the lowest hand loses."

Then, with the cards lying face upward on the table, he explained to the two beginners the value of a pair, two pairs, three of a kind, and so on, — the ordinary hands of draw poker. The others looked on indifferently; after all, as well a choice by cards as any other means. When the two missionaries had learned their lesson, the man from Chicago said: "Now, if you've got that in your heads, we will play in earnest. First jack deals."

And he dealt until a jack fell before Father Asdadur.

"Shall we let one deal settle it?" asked Morris.

"Why not have it this way," suggested the professor, never lacking in a happy suggestion, "why not have the high man drop out after each deal and leave the others to fight it out? Then the choice will come between the two left in at the last."

This modification was agreed to, and Father Asdadur dealt the first hand, dealt it in silence, and his very clumsiness added to the tension. The six men studied their cards, threw down their discards, called for the number they wanted, and then declared what they had. It was absolute chance disposing of a life. The man from Chicago had three kings and went out; he was safe. In the next round, Father Asdadur found fortune and went out in his turn. Then one after another the young missionaries held the highest hand, and so escaped the danger. The last hand came between Morris and Professor Peabody. Morris dealt.

"One card," said the professor, and his lips were dry.

"I'll take one," said Morris.

Both men discarded a single card, picked up a single card, and then slowly looked at it.

"Aces up," said the professor.

"I drew for a flush," said Morris, with a huskiness in his voice, "and — I didn't fill."

He threw down his cards, and for a moment no one spoke.

"It's all right," said Eli, "fate understands these things. I told you I was the man to go."

That broke the spell, and the others crowded about him with show of sympathy. No doubt they were sorry for him; no doubt they were not sorry for themselves. How do men feel on a raft when one of their number has been chosen to go overboard to save the rest? That's the way they felt. No one could sleep and no one tried to sleep. The rug man from Chicago paced up and down in front of the house, the assistant missionaries talked together in low tones on the veranda, and Professor Peabody gave Father Asdadur some meaty ideas on the proper way to deal with the heathen. Morris wrote letters to his family and one to a girl.

About half an hour before sunrise sounds from the upper regions warned them that the ladies were dressing. There was some excursion planning, no doubt, and their laughter and gay talk showed that they were in the best of humors.

"Hello!" said Morris, "we'll have the women folks down here in a minute," and then going quickly to the others, he charged them on no account to let the ladies know. "I'm glad they're coming down, though," he said to himself; "it's good to have an American girl or two around."

A little later there was an invasion from above, the ladies fresh in their cool morning gowns, and some of them pretty. Coffee was served with a light meal, and just as the sun was rising, Morris stood up and asked the company to sing "Here's to Good Old Yale." At this the men came up like soldiers on parade, and the women rose, too, yielding to an influence they did not understand, and they all sang the old song as perhaps it had never been sung before, certainly not in Kurdistan. While in the center of the group, with lifted coffee-pot, stood Morris, towering half a head over every one, and singing his home-made bass with all the power that was in him, his eyes flashing wondrously.

"There are Eli's fine old discords again," said one of the girls, giggling, and was surprised that the men did not laugh.

Suddenly there came the sound of marching feet outside. A hoarse command rang out and gun butts grounded on the gravel. The ladies rushed to the window.

"It's some of those horrid Kurds!" cried one.

Then the ladies joined in laughing at the queer uniforms and the ugly faces. Morris, meantime, unobserved, had shaken hands with the other men.

Father Asdadur rose hastily and went to the front of the house. As he went out Eli exchanged glances with him.

"You ladies stay here," he said; "I'll go out and see what it is."

The other men followed after and stood about awkwardly. The sheikh came forward with a fine dignity of presence and said something in his native tongue. Father Asdadur replied, and then there was parleying.

"Make them understand," said Professor Peabody, "that I represent one of the greatest institutions in the United States, and can promise them anything they desire."

"The sheikh says that he has never heard of the United States," said Father Asdadur, translating; "he says he has given his terms and has come for an answer."

"But tell him, for God's sake, make him understand, that this young man comes of fine family, that his father is very rich, that — that — that he has been entrusted to my keeping."

"The sheikh says that the young man of their band who was killed from here had a father and mother, too."

"Don't bother about it any more," said Eli, touching the professor's arm; "it isn't much, anyhow." And he stepped forward with just the same unflinching look in his eyes he had shown in the old days when summoned before the faculty.

"But," cried the professor, stepping forward, "who can say that the bullet which killed this poor warrior came from here?"

The sheikh turned to one of his followers, who opened a leathern pouch and drew something from it.

"The sheikh presents you the bullet with his compliments, and says that it comes from a rifle the like of which does not exist in all Kurdistan. He speaks the truth, this is a bullet from a Martini rifle; yours is the only rifle it could come from." Then he added very slowly, "I congratulate you, professor, on your marksmanship."

By this time the Xeibecks were plainly growing impatient and motioned that they would wait no longer.

"Good-by, professor," said Eli, head high, but eyes saying things. Then hesitating: "You know it's all — all — for 'Dear Old Yale,'" and he gripped the professor's well-shaped hand in an athlete's squeeze.

"Where are you going, Mr. Morris?" asked one of the girls from one of the windows.

"Oh, just to see these fellows do some musket practise," said Eli lightly.

"Look!" exclaimed another, "they're taking him by the arms! Why, they're leading him off like a prisoner!"

"Don't be alarmed," called Eli, "it's just a joke. Say, ladies, friends, professor, let's give it to 'em once again, the old song. And he himself struck up: —

"Here's to good old Yale, drink her down,
Here's to good old Yale, drink her down,
Here's to good old Yale,
She's so hearty and so hale,
Drink her down, drink her down, drink her down, down, down."

And he kept on singing while three barbarians, who knew no more of Yale than they did of mercy, formed on either side of him and started at the word of command.

As the sun came over the hills, lighting up the glories of the Euphrates valley, this little company of Christians, far from their homes, stood on the piazza and watched the departing group, while their voices sounded out in the dear old words. And while they sang the Xeibeck band marched slowly up the slope, until the last thing seen of Eli was his figure outlined on the hilltop in the red sunshine, while his voice came down faintly to his friends in the chorus that has been sung by the brave men of many brave classes, and will be sung as long as Yale endures: —

"Balm of Gilead, Gilead,
Balm of Gilead, Gilead,
We won't go there any more, we won't go there any more."

"Why, how queer you men look," said the wife of the young missionary; "what's the matter?"

Just then the sound of shots came over the hill and echoed away in the distance.

"They're shooting already," said one of the Constantinople teachers.

"Yes," said Father Asdadur, his eyes resting tenderly on the hilltop, "they're shooting."

"Good God," said Professor Peabody to himself, "this is awful;" and then he told the truth.

"O girls," came a voice from within, "see here, I do believe these men have been playing poker! Think of that at a mission station! Just look at this table!"

Mrs. Asdadur was speaking, and the ladies hurried to her call. The men followed after them.

"This is a good hand, isn't it, professor," she said, picking up five cards that lay on top of the others. Rather absently Professor Peabody looked over her shoulder, then started back, with knitting brows. The cards lay on the table just as they had been thrown down after that last fateful deal. He picked up the five cards lying next. It was his hand, two aces, two eight spots, and a jack, — no danger of his forgetting that.

Turning to the other men, he said: "Morris drew for a flush, didn't he?"

"Yes, poor chap," said the rug man. "Don't you remember he threw down when he didn't fill?"

"I remember," said the professor, and was silent for a full half minute, and his face became very white. Then he said, with a look in his eyes no one had ever seen there, "Gentlemen, this is Morris's hand; he did fill."

And at that moment Professor Walter Lathrop Sheffield Peabody (to give him all his names again) understood that Yale University had turned out a bigger man than he.

The Casket of Pandora.

BY MARGARET DODGE.

IT stood in a cobwebbed corner, in the garret of a suburban villa, — a huge zinc and wood trunk, scarred, and dented, and covered with varicolored labels. Across its top was painted in bold, white, straggling letters the word THEATER — with the effect of a child's printing on a slate. It gave forth, when opened, an odor indescribable, half sickening, — the odor of stale "make-up," the odor theatrical of grease paint and powder that hangs around oft-used stage gowns and properties. It was, in short, a wardrobe trunk, and one that had seen hard service.

To the woman who knelt there in the mellow light of the October afternoon the old trunk was more than mere zinc and wood. It was the conjurer's box, out of which memory, the magician, evoked scenes and figures many colored, ever shifting, incredible, — the scenes of that life of the theater that to-day seemed as far from her own as though it had been seven centuries instead of seven years since her first season on the stage. Ah, that first season! The lips of the kneeling woman curved into a tender scorn at the memory of it,— at the memory of that year when her other self had played milkmaids, marchionesses,— what not? — in a Western repertoire company, and when the glamour of youth and boundless ambition had gilded even the dingy dressing rooms of county seat "opera houses." It was in one of the dingiest of these, she remembered,— a room where she was nightly jostled by the four other women of the company, and put off with the awkwardest corner, the poorest light, and the roughest board shelf that ever did duty for a dressing table, — it was here that her trunk had first reached her, — new and shiny, and stamped with the hall mark of a well-known theatrical trunk maker. And because that special night she had, in her zeal of the

novice, arrived at least an hour ahead of the earliest of her companions, she had beguiled the property man into painting on its lid that significant legend; — a task which the big unkempt fellow had performed to the tune of such glowing prophecies of days when her trunk should "go to the star dressing rooms in the toniest theaters," as had sent her into a seventh heaven of theatrical beatitude. In that hour she had forgotten the sordid details of her surroundings, — the whitewashed walls covered with scrawling penciled initials, burnt match marks, and torn red and yellow playbills, — had forgotten the flat, drab little towns of their route, the insistent drolleries of the Heavy Man, the depressing menus of flyspecked hostelries; forgotten even the long "jumps" that sent the company once a week stumbling down unlighted, unpaved streets to untimely train takings; forgotten everything, in fact, except the ardors and ambitions of this incongruous, topsy-turvy, yet passionately loved world behind the scenes.

"Ah —"

The sound came from lips that no longer curved scornfully. She shivered a little, that woman who knelt there in the afternoon sunlight, and brushed one hand across her forehead like one not sure of her own identity. It was all such worlds away from her life of to-day. And yet, once all those feelings had been hers, — and more: — the hard-worked-for promotion of the two years following, the dizzy delight of that night when a Chicago manager, visiting an Indiana river-port, had seen her play and had called her up higher to a position as leading lady in his new drama; the exultations and depressions of his months of tutelage; and then that Chicago first night, flowers, ovations, thunderous applause, the never-to-be-forgotten look of a thousand faces upturned to hers.

The woman's blue eyes were fixed now in a somnambulic stare; her lips parted, smiling, as little by little the search-light of memory illumined every detail of that performance, even to the opera cloak — a wonderful affair of sapphire-blue velvet lined with ermine — that she had worn in her great scene. The pivot of the play, her manager had called the garment, and indeed, what with being put on and off, laid across a chair-back in the

firelight as a background for her dark head and proud shoulders, and finally folded around her as she strayed out into a stage snow-storm, it had played an almost human part. But she knew and he knew the exultation his words covered.

"This is only the beginning," he had said, the next afternoon, as he called at her hotel sitting room, noted the bouquets that banked her mantelpiece, and reread the flattering notices in the newspapers.

Only the beginning!

The woman who knelt in the glow of the October sunset looked down at the sapphire-blue cloak where it lay, camphor-scented, wrinkled, its folds undisturbed these four years past. She looked around at the attic storeroom, with its cedar chests, its rows of red chintz piece bags, its atmosphere of housewifely care. She rose, and walking to the window, let her eyes wander over the neat lawn, the immaculate gravel path and trim nasturtium beds, and then to the little Queen Anne villa opposite, whose irregular porticoes, golden-brown gables, and crisp, white muslin curtains, reproduced the house she lived in like the image in a looking-glass. The image of a happy home, she told herself, as she, in her soft gray house gown with its spotless collar and cuffs, was the picture of a happy matron. And in truth, she had been very happy in that pretty home and its placid, sheltered life, — so happy that only the evening before, sitting silently with her husband in the twilight, she had laughed softly at the memory of her manager's bitter prophecy at parting four years ago, — his prediction of the vain regret she would one day feel for the career she had, as he put it, "thrown over for a passing fancy." To-day, too, she laughed at the memory — but with a difference; for now her accent was all that of the stage world; and suddenly the laughter broke into sobs, and the happy woman's dark head drooped upon her heaving breast.

As she raised both hands to brush away the tears, a bit of paper fell from her unconsciously clenched fingers into the open trunk tray before her. It was the letter that had brought her to this long-forgotten corner. Through the mist over her eyes she reread the words as through the veil: —

My dear pupil: — Four years ago, you thought the world well lost for love, and flung away success — yours and mine — as a child might a half-eaten apple.

At the time I was unnecessarily angered at what I termed your desertion. But my feeling for my favorite pupil has outlived anger.

Besides, I know you. I know that long before this your artist nature must have triumphed. It is always so. You may give up the stage; it never gives up you. You may fancy that you have forgotten it; but one day, like Pandora in the old Greek legend, you open the forbidden casket — and, presto! the spirits of your past existence are alive and possess you.

Why do I write this? Because I need you, — you, who alone can understand my ideas. Because I have a new play, — whose leading character you only can create.

In two weeks I begin rehearsals at Chicago. Will you come back to the world that is yours by right of conquest? Will you gain glory for yourself and for the teacher who gave his best energies to your success? If you will — listen. It is a melodramatic request, maybe — but you know we stage people are always romantic, sentimental, if you like; we never do things in the every-day fashion. Well — this afternoon at five I shall pass your home. If you consent — *be on your piazza wearing the sapphire-blue cloak in which you made our triumph.* Then I shall understand, and the rest will be easy.

At five o'clock! The woman's eyes sought the clock in a neighboring steeple, and noted that it lacked twenty minutes of the hour. They sought once more the Queen Anne cottage opposite, then narrowed to include the cedar chests and rows of red chintz piece bags. Finally, they returned to the trunk, where the sapphire-blue cloak still lay undisturbed.

As she looked, a strange desire surged into her heart, — the desire to assume again that enchanted garment, again to walk in fancy the once beloved boards; and then to fold the garment and its memories away forever.

Steadily, though with eyes burning like those of a long abstainer who reaches for the forbidden cup, she rose, and slowly stretching out her hand, drew the soft velvet folds of the cloak about her. But at the touch of it and the scent of it, a feeling irresistible, unbelievable, tingled through her body. Once more she lived the life of the theater; once more she smelt the odor of raw gas mingled with that of powder and grease paint; once more she heard the scraping and creaking of scenery; she felt the hum of the audience, the thrill of the overture, — all that maddening under-rhythm of the world behind the scenes, whose call is to the player as the bugle note to the soldier.

Against that overmastering voice from the past what availed mere steeling of will and clenching of hands? Nothing to the

woman, who, half blinded, half sickened, forgetful of all the ties that so lately had seemed inviolable, staggered down the stairs and out upon the little porch.

The stage had called; for the moment its voice seemed to fill the universe.

Only for that moment, though. With the next, another voice spoke to her; it came with the rush of a tiny white figure, with the fluttering of yellow curls, with the pressure of soft little hands on the velvet folds of her garment. It said: "O mamma, are you going away in the pitty cloak and leave *me?*"

"My darling!"

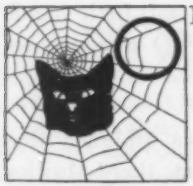
Into those words, and through the convulsive embrace that strained the clinging figure to the mother's breast, there thrilled who knows what of shame, of remorse, of that all but divine impulse compared to which the transports of the artist are only as the shadow of a dream? It was the lightning-swift revulsion of a body freed from thralldom by some supreme recoil of spirit.

Five minutes later a man strolling leisurely along the opposite side of the street shot a casual glance at the empty piazza of the pretty Queen Anne cottage, halted for an instant, his eyes on a muslin-curtained window, then, turning, strode swiftly away into the gathering twilight. What he had seen was a common enough sight at this time, and on this street of homes, — simply a woman sitting quietly behind the sunset-gilded panes, her head bent against the shining head of a child.

But in that instant the man knew that he had received his answer, and that it was unchanging.

A Romance of the Palisades.

BY E. O. WEEKS.



IN the western shore of the Hudson, a few miles south of the point where the great river spreads out to its widest, and situated within the evening shadows of the towering Palisades, stands a fine old mansion. Of colonial dignity of architecture, its terraced grounds, its wide, weather-beaten front, its fluted white columns, and spacious doorways, convey even to the casual passer-by a certain suggestion of romance. Then what pleasant recollections must cluster around this old-time mansion for me, whose memory still retains in all its vividness a bit of history pertaining to the house in the days when this century was young. To-day, after many years of silence, I commit no breach of faith in giving a transcript of that story as it was related to me.

At the time of my connection with it the old mansion belonged to my kind friend, a venerable lady who had lived there since her youth. Even at the period to which I refer she was an attractive woman. Her voice was melody itself; her manners were refined and charming; her disposition was benignant; and throughout the whole countryside she was celebrated, like Cornelia, the Roman matron, for her wisdom and her love of home.

One afternoon I sat in the stately drawing room, gazing at her portrait, painted when she was a girl of barely seventeen.

If in her old age she showed traces of beauty what shall I say of the loveliness revealed in this portrait?

The likeness was that of a graceful young girl, pleasingly attired, her complexion remarkably dark, but with a lovely suffusion of color, her eyes and hair black. The appearance of perfect health, the dewy lip, the dimpled cheek, the pliant ease of youthful limbs, the swelling bosom's full inspiration of sweet air,—all these lent to the picture a wonderful charm; but after a time

the observer saw more than this. There was something in the expression of the face that caught and held his attention. He saw a startled lifting of the eyelids, a strange illumination of the eyes, a quivering curve of the faultless lips, which, by some intangible mastery of the painter's art, conveyed the intimation of a recent escape from peril threatening to the very treasures of the soul.

It was a signal display of the power of mind over matter — of the light of thought shining through pigments made of earth.

On this particular occasion I was so lost in study of the picture that I did not hear a footstep near my chair. But when a gentle hand touched my arm, I looked up to see my friend.

"What is it in my early portrait that so engages your attention?" she inquired.

"A story," I replied, "told by the artist without words."

The lady looked quietly at her younger self, and then she said: —

"There *is* a story connected with that picture, and I will tell it to you. It is not a secret, and yet it opens the book of my life at a chapter where the pages have long been closed.

"At the time when I sat for that portrait I was blooming like a rose in a garden. I was really Nature's own child, improved by cultivation, but ever loyal to my mother earth. So from day to day I was happy, unaffected, and unsuspicious. I knew, perhaps, of conditions of evil in the wide world, alien to my joyous and healthful life; but, like other girls of my age and place, I thought of these as far removed from my estate, or fancied if they came near to me I should know them at once, as we recognize a coming storm by gathering clouds.

"Even as an eager reader of many books, I did not learn much by inference of the world's ways; and so I turned to Nature for instruction.

"The flowers in my aunt's garden, the trout in the meadow stream shining with silver and a speckled touch of ruby, the dip of a bird's wing as it skimmed over the unruffled surface of the pond — none of these escaped my attention.

"I was quick to accept as signs of a good world the light that gilds the lily, and the song of the meadow wren. In the sanctu-

ary of my own room I gave offerings of praise to the Supreme Creator for the blessings I enjoyed.

"Briefly speaking, I was an innocent naturalist.

"In such vestal seclusion I lived until the coming of the spring that brought my seventeenth birthday. Then, by my aunt's desire, an arrangement was effected by which I went to New York to have my portrait painted. As was the custom in those days, my trips were made on sailing vessels, passing up and down the river. My aunt had friends in the city, with whom I stayed until the artist declared that he must give the picture its finishing touches in my own home; but before it came to that, I went regularly to his studio in what would now be considered a street far down in the town.

"This artist was a remarkable man, and now, after these many years, I regret that I did not profit more, or endeavor to profit more, by his conversation.

"He had a fiery and irritable disposition, which seemed to me exceedingly wearing upon his slender frame. Many of his habits were singular. He talked aloud as he painted, commenting freely upon the features of his sitter,— a habit which I knew robbed him of many opportunities of remunerative work. His most frequent exclamation was 'Strange!' and this word he repeated over and over many times. Often he would lean back in his chair, his palette resting on the arm, his right hand raised with the brush poised high in the air, his keen gray eyes burning with intense perception, his hawk-like face pinched with the energy of his thought. 'Strange!' he would say, 'most strange!' and then fall to work again.

"But I was young, often restless, and often I tried his patience sorely.

"At last he declined to add more to his picture in New York. 'The Athenian,' he said, 'must be seen in Athens, and the Girl of Lesbos belongs to her island.'

"And so the old master came to visit us here, and here he seemed like a different man.

"Every day he went about with me, endeavoring, so I thought, to see with actual sympathy my favorite walks and haunts. The speckled trout in the meadow stream, the kingfisher perched like

a living gem above the tranquil pool, the rose-bordered path, — these things and others he viewed with calm appreciation and a constant study of my face.

"Finally, one morning, he said that the picture was finished and ready for its setting; and in the afternoon he sailed for New York to order a frame.

"During the few days of his absence the events occurred of which I shall now speak for the first time.

"It was a lovely afternoon in June. My aunt, whose health was always delicate, had the blinds of her room partly closed and the curtains down, while she sought an hour's repose. The other members of the household were variously engaged; I, alone, left the house, and passing through the rose-garden, where I gathered a large bunch of mingled beauties, I went on to a summer-house which quite overhung the kingfisher's pool, and also gave a charming glimpse of the river, and nearer by, of the broad highway and its overshadowing trees. Here I sat in well-earned indolence; for my forenoons were still devoted to reading and study. Only the kingfisher's jeweled eye was near to observe my entrance into this bower — or, at least, so I thought. We were friends, and as I leaned from a little balcony directly above the water, his reflection and mine appeared side by side in nature's mirror. A light wind was stirring. I loosened the coils of my abundant hair, permitting it to fall dowr over my shoulders and even to my belt. It was curly by nature, and I felt a cooling sensation of relief when the caressing air brushed the soft ringlets about my brow.

"Thus at ease, happy in my retirement, with my roses on the bench by my side, I thought of the old master's Girl of Lesbos, with a smile at the quaint conceit.

"On a convenient little shelf in the summer-house lay a few books of natural history which it was my pleasure to have at hand and sometimes read. Opening one of these at random, my eyes caught the following passage, afterward of momentous interest to me: —

"'The American woodman, from the door of his isolated hut of birch or hemlock bark, frequently has opportunities of observation that the trained naturalist would gladly accept. His

opportunities are those which come from intimate association with nature. His life, his means of subsistence, without other artificial aids than those of his ax and his gun, are dependent upon her bounty and her homely wisdom of the forest.

"'Shut in at times from a view of the heavens by the loftiest trees, he is yet enabled by a system of minute observations to tell with surprising accuracy of what is passing over the face of the sky. He has his warnings close to his ear of the oncoming tempest, which prudence may suggest that he would better meet outside of the tangled thicket, or low-lying swamp, where he is then at work.

"'I have often been much entertained with descriptions of forest events, told of by these men around the camp-fire at night.

"'One old woodman, I remember, said that there was one act of nature which he never viewed without awe. Near his hut stood a tall dead tree, hoary with age, and stripped of its bark by repeated storms. Often he examined this old monarch with care, and could not discover any sufficient hold which it had upon the earth to keep it erect; apparently a mere summer breeze might blow it down.

"'One night came a violent tempest. It shook the old man's frail cabin in its sheltered nook, as if to carry it off like a shifting leaf. It twisted the branches of sturdy trees, and tore up others by the roots. All night the storm raged, but at dawn it died away to a whispering murmur. Early in the morning the old woodman started for his daily toil, determined, on the way, to visit the dead tree and discover, if possible, what anchorage had enabled it to stand in place for so long a time. He was sure, he thought, to find it prostrate, and its aged roots exposed. But when he came to the spot, he stood transfixed with wonder. Like a man of a hundred years, shrunken and bleached, with a lusty younger generation dying at his feet, the ancient tree still bore its scarred and battered shaft upward in the light!

"'A few days later the woodman's travel in the forest again brought him into the vicinity of the mysterious tree. It was a still summer afternoon. The leafy solitudes were reposing under a spell of sylvan enchantment. There was not a stir among the leaves of an aspen. But even as the woodcutter's eye scanned

the time-worn tree, a shudder passed over its entire length; its aged arms shook with a palsy; it reeled for a moment then turned upon its base, and with a sigh, almost a groan, dropped to its bed of loam.

"'What, then, is this mystery of the forest? Is it true, as the woodmen believe, that the very trees have their appointed time?'

"This was the passage which caught my attention on the naturalist's page. I read it through with interest, then slowly lifted my eyes from the book.

"A stranger — evidently a foreigner — stood before me, hat in hand, an expression of polite concern upon his pale, attractive face, as if he feared to alarm or disturb me. He was of medium stature, but so well proportioned and graceful that he appeared even tall. His garments — carelessly worn — were rich of texture and became him well. 'His auburn locks on either shoulder flowed.' His eyes were large and gray, having the wide-open lids and broad iris of a lion's, and also that peculiar power of circumspection which resembles a lion's glance.

"All these details, however, I did not notice at first. What held me spellbound was the fact that this stranger seemed not altogether strange — that at the first glance he impressed me as one known before, though how or when I could not recollect.

"From this momentary spell I was partially roused by the freshening breeze, which blew my loosened hair about my face like a veil; and with a disconcerted movement I brushed it aside with my hand.

"Then perhaps the intruder saw the mantling color of my cheeks, the red flag of alarm — for I knew not what to think or say. As if to reassure me, he spoke quickly, and at the first word my fancy of a previous meeting vanished, for the voice was strange to me.

"'If I have startled you, I beg your pardon,' he said gently. 'I came up from the river across the meadow, and you did not hear my step.

"'I am a stranger here, and am trying to find some path to the summit of the Palisades. Can you direct me?'

"I assured him that there was such a path, and even pointed out its entrance to him from where I sat.

"The stranger thanked me as if for granting him a most unusual favor. His words were eloquent, and the expression of his eyes was even more eloquent than his words. Then — as if the exclamation burst from him against his will — he declared that it must be delightful to enjoy such evident health as mine. As for himself, he had felt faint out in the sun, and was glad to get a moment's rest under the trees.

"For some reason it never occurred to me to think of any other shade than that of my bower, and as the fine pallor of his cheeks seemed to confirm his words, I asked him to be seated while I ran for a goblet of water to the spring which overflowed into the kingfisher's pool. When I returned he had gathered up my roses, and as he drank from the glass he fixed his gaze upon them. Afterward he buried his face in their bloom.

"Then for half an hour without intermission, he poured forth a flood of words concerning those flowers such as I had not thought could come without premeditation from the lips of one not an immortal. It was a wild frenzy of exposition, admiration, and floral history. The very thorns of the rose, he said, made it notable as the queen of flowers. They were like the stilettos of the peerless Venetian women.

"Who that man was, to this day I do not know,— not even his name is known to me,— but certainly he was gifted with many arts. He had paid me no compliment directly, yet indirectly what he said concerning my roses seemed to apply to me. There were inferences I could not escape, nor yet deny, nor acknowledge. He was at least fifteen years my senior,— to judge by his conversation,— a traveler in many lands, and possessed of an eloquence of language to which I listened, rapt in speechless wonder.

"Under the guise of simply asking and giving information, he implied that my eyes were more lustrous than those of the beauties of Spain, my complexion darker, yet softer and more transparent than that of the lovely women of the Orient. And still as though merely in quest of knowledge, he inquired if it was by the flowing of Indian blood in my veins that I differed thus from what he called 'those beautiful women in distant lands.'

"Now, in our family there was a tradition of connection through a Virginian ancestry with John Rolfe and his Indian bride; and,

hard pressed for a reply to make to this man of dangerous eloquence, I answered him to that effect.

"He seemed pleased to have his remark verified; and then, apparently observing my embarrassment for the first time, he became more reserved, speaking politely, entertainingly, yet with a respectful intonation that put me once more at my ease.

"At last he rose, declaring that he must press on if he would reach the summit of the Palisades by sunset. As his eyes followed the winding curve of the path, appearing and disappearing in the acclivities, it seemed to me that he hesitated to ascend these unknown heights alone.

"By what subsequent arguments he induced me to act as his guide I cannot at present recollect. Thoughtless I certainly was but not through indifference, but rather through my childlike sympathy and interest for this stranger in a strange land.

"The sun was already casting its declining rays over the banks of the Hudson when we stood on the summit, and the world — my world, at least — lay spread out to our view. As we looked to the north, we saw the great Tappan Sea of the Hudson lying like a buckler of yellow metal a league wide and rimmed with verd-antique; southward we saw the smoky canopy over the distant fort of New York; while downward our sight fell to the river, five hundred feet below our rocky perch. Midway an eagle soared. It seemed from that high cliff as if the majestic bird could descend and grasp with ease in its talons a small boat making for the western shore. Even with all my vigorous strength, I felt exhausted. But my companion showed opposite signs; his pale cheeks vere glowing and his eyes shone fiercely bright as they regarded intently the circling eagle and the distant boat.

"As I looked first at him and then around upon that isolated summit, a vague fear and distrust sprang suddenly to my heart.

"Our resting place was a grass-carpeted ledge. Backward a few paces rose a second acclivity, perhaps sixty feet in height, and having a toppling brow and an angry frown. With roots attached among beetling crags, stood a dead cedar tree, polished to whiteness by the elements, and beyond doubt a favorite perch of the eagle's. The naturalist's incident was fresh in my mind. I gazed with dread at this tree. It seemed to me, as I looked, that it

would fall upon us and sweep us from the cliff. But a moment's study convinced me that I need fear no harm from it. Its powerful roots were driven into deep clefts, and the lasting nature of its wood prohibited decay.

"I turned to my companion again. He seemed lost to my presence. His gaze was fixed upon that little boat approaching the nearer shore. My small Temple of Vesta over the kingfisher's pool came to my mental view — a quiet, beautiful, secure retreat. I felt restless because I was so far from it, and decided to return at once. With a hurried declaration of my purpose, I turned to go. But to my surprise and alarm, my companion's manner toward me suddenly changed, and when I would have turned to take the downward path, he prevented this action by quickly seizing my wrists. I struggled at first with anger, and then with piteous complaints, but his hands did not relax his cruel grasp.

"At length he offered to set me at liberty if I would simply listen to reason. Upon my murmured promise of compliance, he told me to sit down by his side while he explained what his purposes were. His voice and manner had become gentle again, but I knew that under his robe of velvet was a coat of mail.

"In the harbor of New York, he said, was then lying a vessel belonging to him, and regularly entered at that port as a South American ship. She was built for either peace or war.

"Briefly speaking, he was a smuggler, and at times a pirate.

"But as he had come into New York to purchase supplies, and his papers were ostensibly correct, there was nothing to indicate that his transactions did not accord with the maritime code. Of this vessel, which he described in glowing terms, it was his desire to make me the sole mistress.

"His purpose — or at least so he said — was that we should go to New York, be married at once, quietly board his ship, and immediately sail for Southern waters.

"'Do not dream,' he said finally, 'that I am speaking on a sudden impulse. This is not the first time that I have seen you.' Then as I started up, astounded by this confirmation of my first fancy of a previous meeting, he proceeded to explain how he had taken temporary quarters in the same building, indeed, next to the very studio, where I had sat for my picture; how he had watched

me come and go every day for weeks; how finally he had found out who I was and where I lived, intending even then to carry out the plan culminating to-day.

"'How little you guessed,' he finished, with a caressing intonation, 'that the unknown man you sometimes brushed by on the stairs loved you and was planning how he could win you for his wife.'

"Then, pointing to the little boat that I had seen approaching, he informed me that it was his, and built for peace or war. We would descend in that direction, he said, enter the boat, and so pass down to the city at night.

"It was not his wish to use harsh measures, but I must obey. Such in substance was his proposal, or command.

"How can I explain to you what my feelings were? Seated on that narrow ledge of rock in midair, I felt as powerless to deny or oppose my captor as though I were his slave standing upon the deck of his pirate ship. In my consternation and despair I sprang to my feet. I waved my hand. I called aloud for help. Out of the void came a mocking answer, the wild cry of the eagle. I thought next to cast myself down on the broken rocks at the base of the cliff; but nature prohibits such violent transitions. Those who have suffered long, those who have repeatedly prayed for death, may suddenly end existence; but every pulse of my young body throbbed with eager, healthful life, and I shrank away from the gulf with my hands before my face.

"I drew back to the broadest part of the ledge, and seizing a maple sapling for support, I stood there, determined to hold fast until my fingers were torn loose.

"Half fainting, trembling, with my hair falling about my neck, I was very different from the joyous girl who had so fearlessly ascended to that dangerous spot in an antecedent hour. A knowledge of my unwise confidence, of the full extent of my folly, was now crushing my heart. I moaned. I wept. But even through the agony of my tears I could see my tormentor, who had withdrawn a few feet from me, standing unmoved, complacent, calmly guarding the only path of escape.

"It was then that my mother earth shivered, as if shaken with anger because of her daughter's distress.

"From the frowning brow of the smaller cliff above my head came a little puff of smoke-like dust, a low, groaning sound, a sudden rush of cold air, followed by a bolting object as savage in its swift descent as a gray wolf.

"It tore up the turf of the narrow shelf.

"It plunged into the abyss with a hollow roar.

"I looked at the spot where my would-be abductor had stood.

"He was not there!

"The very ground was thrown up as if by a giant's shovel! An act of nature had avenged my misplaced trust; a stone, huge, grim, and jagged, had fallen from its bed! The strain of that hour had been too great for consciousness, and I swooned.

"When I revived, the old master was bending over me with a most anxious face. As soon as I was enough recovered to tell my story, he explained to me that, having missed me at home, he had taken the upward path after hearing the hollow roar of the fallen stone.

"When half way up, he saw a group of men carrying a dead or injured person into a boat near the foot of the cliff, and so had hastened to reach the summit.

"'My child,' he whispered, 'this is strange, most strange! You are innocent of harm and of evil; be comforted.'

"After a few days it was his desire to retouch my portrait. When it was finished, he said, 'I have told a story without words.'"

A Postponed Arrest.

BY LELAND INGERSOLL.

"HE'S the man you're after, I guess," said Sheriff Bryan, when he had carefully examined the copiously stamped and sealed documents, and listened to the statements of his visitor; "don't you think so, boys?"

The interested clerks and deputies voiced prompt concurrence with their chief's opinion. "It's queer we never suspected anything about him," said one of the little group. "He was a hard case, you say?"

"About the worst I ever see," answered the New Mexico official, with a yawn which seemed to measure centuries of sleeplessness. "They ain't any of 'em what you might call mild in my distric', but Ellis was the cream of the lot. I don't know as he was vicious, exactly, but the uneasiest, recklessest cuss in the county; seemed like he just couldn't stay quiet and peaceable. Still, most everybody liked him — I did myself — and when this thing came out a good many of us were sorry it wasn't some other fellow. So he's taken to farmin', eh?"

Bryan nodded. "It ain't much of a farm; more like a stone quarry, and half of it straight up and down. He's managed to get along, though, and paid his rent prompt, they tell me. He comes down to the corners a couple of times a month for supplies and things sent on from the East by express, and that's all we see of him. No one round here has ever been inside the house, so far as I know, except the doctor. He goes up now and then to see the old man. I wonder whether it's his father. That's what he claims."

"Most likely," said the Western sheriff; "I don't know who else."

"He's about done for, anyway, Doc says. Blind and half paralyzed. I hope he's lucky enough not to know the truth about his son."

"Mebbe he does know, and that's what's the matter with him. Well, there's no use wastin' time, and we'd better be startin' out, I judge. If you could let me have a wagon and two or three men, I'll see that you're fixed up for it all right."

"You can take my rig," said Bryan. "Bill, go out and bring it round, and you, and Kelley, and Ryder go with Mr. McQuistion. Maybe you'd better take more men."

"Three's plenty, and it'll be more comfortable riding. How far do you call the place from here?"

"Two miles and a half, and up hill most of the way. Bill knows the road."

The wagon rattled up to the door, and the men took their places, wrapping themselves closely in the blankets. The wind was strong, and whirled the snow in angry puffs against them as the horses picked their way slowly over the frozen ground. It was too cold for useless talk, and, excepting the muttered commands of the driver, almost nothing was said during the long half-hour's climb up the winding hill road.

At length the deputy checked the horses in the shelter of a ledge of rock which rose like an abrupt wall. "We can't drive any further," he said; "there's only a foot-path from here on. The shanty's just around the corner."

McQuistion peered into the darkness ahead. "It'll limber us up to walk, but we may be some time gettin' things fixed," he said. "Will the team stand all right, do you think?"

"Till morning," answered the other. "They're out of the wind here."

"Get down, boys," said the sheriff, and the men swung themselves from the wagon and waited while the driver heaped the blankets upon the horses and tethered them to one of the dwarf pine trees which grew from the seemingly solid rock; then McQuistion led the way, and the others followed, along a narrow and little-used path at a right angle to the main road. They had stumbled on in silence for some time when a sharp turn to the left showed the light of the cabin a few yards away.

The leader halted and waited till his men gathered about him. "We'll surround the house," he said. "Bill, you go to the back, one of you fellows take each side, and I'll look after the front.

Don't make no more noise than ye can help, and if ye see anybody movin' yell at him to stop, and shoot if he don't stop. Go ahead now. When I think you've had time enough to get ready, I'll whistle and you answer me. Then I'll go towards the door and give him a hail. Look sharp."

The deputies dived among the trees at the side of the path, and the sheriff waited, his ears strained to catch any sound of an alarm. The silence was unbroken, however, and at last he began to move forward warily and noiselessly, with the yielding step of an animal. He stopped a dozen paces from the cabin and whistled sharply. He was answered at once from either side, and the light which streamed from the window of the cabin was blocked for an instant, as though some one inside had heard the signal and looked out to learn the cause.

The sheriff lifted his voice in the long wailing call of the plainsmen. "O Dan," he cried, "Dan Ellis!"

There was the sound of a slowly raised sash.

"Who is it?" asked a voice which the sheriff recognized with a grim chuckle. "What do you want?"

"It's me, Dan. It's Sam McQuistion, and I want you. Do you know me?"

A long silence followed, and the sheriff made ready for the struggle which he thought inevitable. At last the door was opened, and a man stood on the threshold looking out uncertainly. "Whereabouts are you?" he called.

"Here," answered the sheriff, loosening the revolver in his belt.

The man walked toward him swiftly.

"Is it you, Mac, sure enough?" he asked.

"Yes, it's me," said McQuistion. "Stand where you are, Dan, and don't make no fuss; there's a *posse* with me. Halt, I tell you."

Ellis stopped before the weapon's glittering menace, and held out his open hands. "You needn't worry," he said. "There's no fight in me now. What is it, the same old Cruces business?"

"The very same," the sheriff answered. He came out of the shadow of the trees and approached Ellis, who stood waiting in the flickering shaft of light from the doorway. The three depu-

ties glided from behind the house, and closed in upon them noiselessly.

Ellis gave one hurried glance about him, and turned quickly to McQuistion.

"If you'll wait an hour I'll go with you," he said. "If you won't, you'll have to take me. You know what that means, Mac."

The sheriff held up his hand to stop his followers. "What difference will an hour make?" he asked.

"My father is in there," said Ellis, pointing towards the cabin. "He's alone, and dying. If I've got to leave him now, I want a little time so I can make some arrangements to have him taken care of." He hesitated for a moment, and then went on desperately. "He don't know what I have done," he said. "He thinks I'm straight. For God's sake, let him die thinking that way."

"I don't understand, exactly," said McQuistion, moved by the evident agony of the appeal.

"Come in, and I'll show you," Ellis answered, turning back in the direction of the house. "Oh, it's the truth," he added fiercely, as the deputies started forward to intercept him. "Can't you see I'm telling you the truth?"

The sheriff waved back his men. "I'll chance it, Dan," he said. "Go ahead."

The young man led the way in silence, the officers following close at his heels. At the door he paused and turned again. "I'll have to lie about your being here," he said. "I wish you wouldn't give me away if you can help it."

The sheriff nodded. "We'll keep mum," he said.

"You won't be sorry, I think," said Ellis. "And I'll thank you, though that doesn't amount to much. Come in, then."

The room which they entered was long and low, and almost destitute of decoration. The walls had been daubed with clay to stop up the chinks between the unevenly fitted logs, and the same material served to fill the cracks of the uneven floor.

A huge chimney projected some four or five feet from the west wall, and in the recess so formed on the further side of the fireplace some attempt had been made to secure comfort and homelikeness.

A square of many-colored carpet was spread where the sunlight, filtering through the narrow window, could linger for a little while each day; and there were two or three chairs and a table of modern shape.

On a bed which had been drawn up close to the blaze of the fire a man was lying, covered with soft Indian blankets. He raised himself with evident exertion at the entrance of the five men, and turned to them a face framed in snow-white hair and beard, and bearing the anxious, dependent, and yet trusting expression of blindness.

"What is it, Dannie?" he asked. "Is anything the matter?"

"Nothing at all," said Ellis gently. "Some men have come up from the mines and we've got a few things to talk over." He crossed the room, and pouring a small glassful from a bottle on the table, carried it carefully to the bedside, and knelt beside the sick man.

"It's medicine time," he said. "Here, dad."

The old man drank the mixture, and when he returned the glass let his hand rest fondly on the young man's for a moment, and spoke in a tone inaudible to the others, then sank down among the pillows with a smile, and closed his eyes.

Ellis rose and came back to the sheriff and his men, who were still standing near the door. He dragged a heavy wooden bench to the corner of the fireplace, and produced a couple of cracker boxes from the other side of the room. "Sit down, if you will," he said, "and I'll tell you how I come to be here, and why I asked you to wait."

McQuistion took possession of one of the boxes, and stretched his long legs to the blaze luxuriously, the deputies following his example. Ellis stood leaning against the chimney, his elbow in a hollow of the masonry and his head resting on his hand.

"First of all, Sam," he said, "what will come of it when we get back there?"

The sheriff hesitated, and looked over his shoulder toward the bed.

"He's asleep," said Ellis. "That medicine acts like a drug on him, and I gave him a big dose. A little more would send him to sleep for good."

"Well," McQuistion said slowly, "I reckon the worst will come of it. I suppose you know what the crowd done to Brady after you got away."

"Yes," answered the other. "I read about it in the papers."

"They were just as hot after you," the sheriff went on, "and we scoured the country for a week. Then things sort of died down, till just a little while ago, when we got news where ye were. That set 'em goin' again, and it looks to me like there's more feelin' against you than there ever was. I don't reckon you better expect any mercy."

"I don't expect any," Ellis answered shortly, "nor deserve any, perhaps. If you had only got here a few days later, I shouldn't have cared. I knew it would have to come sometime; but I did hope nothing would happen for awhile; not until —" He paused and waved his hand toward the sleeper.

The sheriff nodded sympathetically. "I'm sorry, myself," he said.

"This is the way it was," Ellis continued; "when I made my break, I started off on the Alanna trail for a ways, and then turned up into the hills because I knew you would naturally follow along the trail, thinking I couldn't go anywhere else."

"That's what we done," McQuistion admitted. "We followed that blamed road for miles both ways, and had guards waitin' for ye to come out of the bush, but ye didn't come."

"No," said the other, with a mirthless smile, "I didn't come."

"How did ye manage to get back without no one seein' ye? Traveled at night, I reckon, and laid mighty low."

"I didn't get back. I went on."

"Not across the cañon?" said the sheriff, looking up in open amazement.

"Yes, across the cañon. Don't ask me how, for I couldn't tell you. I don't believe I stopped moving for twenty-four hours, and I was more dead than alive half the time. I remember falling in dozens of places. Here is one of the marks." He pushed the hair back from his forehead, and showed a long red seam stretching across the temple. "That pretty near saved you all this trouble," he said.

"I'll bet you're the first man who ever got across," McQuistion

said wonderingly. "I wouldn't have thought ye could make it." His tone roused the deputies, and they regarded Ellis with increased interest as he spoke again.

"I managed it somehow," he said. "I struck Johnsville along in the middle of the night, and told the operator there that I'd been knocked over by the noon train, and laid senseless on the track ever since. He believed me and patched me up as well as he could; then I got aboard the express and made for Kansas City, where I stayed quiet in a hotel till I got better. I had my beard shaved and got rid of my other clothes, though I wasn't afraid you would locate me right off."

"I should say not," agreed the sheriff. "We never thought of your making for the railroad. Didn't suppose it was possible for any man to make it. Why didn't you go on to the Gulf and get aboard some steamer? That's what I'd have done."

"That was my idea," Ellis answered; "but you see I knew that meant good-by to this country for a long time and perhaps altogether, and I wanted to see the old folks before I left. I set out to hunt for them, meaning to stay a little while and give dad some of my cash, and then light out for good, but things turned out different."

He stood erect and faced the listening officers. "I left home fifteen years ago," he said unsteadily; "left home cursing my father because he tried to keep me from ruining myself and every one who cared for me. They never heard a word from me all that time; never knew whether I was alive or dead; but they waited for me just the same, ready to take me back, and hoping and praying I'd come. Mother wouldn't give me up, even after other folks had forgotten all about me. She died looking for me, and had her bed pulled up close to the window, so she could watch the road. That was the last thing she saw, just that stretch of empty road, and nobody coming." He broke off abruptly and leaned against the chimney corner, his face buried in his hands. The others gazed straight before them at the wavering glow of the fire and waited silently.

At length Ellis raised his head and went on with his story. He spoke in an even tone, but so low that his hearers bent toward him, like spectators at a play.

"Father was helpless, and had been getting worse for a long time," he said. "I think it was worrying about me that brought his trouble on. The farm was mortgaged and the notes long past due. He was really living on charity, though people were kind enough to keep him from finding it out. I had some money — you know how I got it — and I brought him out here and rented this place for us to live in. I've thanked God for his blindness, because it's let me give him by my lies the happiness which he couldn't get any other way. I have told him, and he believes, that I own an interest in a mine near here and am doing well. I've told him almost everything that he'd like to have true. I've lied to him in every way except about my being glad to have him here with me." He stopped and let his eyes rest on McQuistion's face. "Do you blame me?" he asked.

The sheriff pulled his long beard thoughtfully. "I don't think anybody'd blame ye," he said; "not me, at any rate. I think I know how ye feel."

"There ain't much more," Ellis said wearily; "unless I should tell you all the feelings I've had, and the thoughts that have lived with me for two years while I've watched my father getting weaker every day. I don't think any of you would want to hear them. They ain't been very pleasant, gentlemen. Perhaps you can imagine how a man would feel in my position, having to lie to the only human being in the world he cares to tell the truth to, and knowing all the time that the whole thing is his fault, and there's nobody else to blame. That don't make it any easier to bear."

All at once his self-control seemed to forsake him, and he took a step forward and held out his arms, as though involuntarily, to the men before him. "I wouldn't ask you for myself," he said huskily. "It's been hell for me all the while; but that old man has got the first taste of happiness he's had since I was a baby, and he used to play with me, with mother looking on and laughing at us. His first chance to take any pride in his son has come to him now, because I've lied to him and he doesn't know the difference. He is proud of me — he said only the other day that he wished mother was alive, so she could know how good a son I was. Think of that, men, and me sitting here in this place and listening to him. Ain't there some way to keep him from know-

ing the truth? It won't be but a little while — ain't there some way? I'm ready to go with you now if it wasn't for him — God knows I'm ready enough." His voice broke and the tears streamed down his cheeks.

The sheriff rose to his feet, and laid his hand awkwardly on the young man's shoulder. "Don't take on so, Dan," he said, as gently as though speaking to a little child. "Mebbe there's some way out of it, after all. Don't take it so hard, boy."

A sound came from the other side of the room, and they turned in sudden apprehension. The sick man was sitting upright, stretching out his hands to the glow of the fire, and talking happily, as though to an unseen hearer. For a moment all were held motionless by a kind of awe, and then with common impulse they hurried toward the bed.

Ellis sank upon his knees and took the trembling hands in his own.

"What's the matter, dad?" he asked anxiously. "Are you worse?"

The old man did not seem to hear the question, but bent his head like one listening to a far-off voice.

"You're always waitin' for me, Marthy," he said, and smiled lovingly at the firelight. "Seems like, no matter where I be, I can fairly see ye sittin' there an' lookin' for me to come round the turn. Where's the boy, up to some mischief? There never was such a little cuss for makin' other people trouble. He gets that from your side of the house, eh, mother? Remember how ye used to make me stand round?" He paused and bent his head again in eager attention, then chuckled to himself, as though some one had answered him.

"Ef he only grows up like ye," he said, "I'll be the happiest man in the county, an' the luckiest." A shade of anxiety crept into his voice. "I reckon he'll come out all right, don't you? He's all we've got, ye know, an' I sort of think no boy can go wrong with you a teachin' him."

Some recollection flashed through Ellis's mind, and his face was drawn with the pain which he could not altogether keep back.

"I had a hard time gettin' through," the sick man went on. "The road's growin' harder, an' harder an' it's tired me considerable.

I ain't so spry as I was once. Call in the boy, an' let's shut up for the night. Seems like I can't keep awake, somehow."

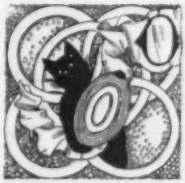
He closed his eyes and sank back heavily. Ellis tried in vain to lift him. "Speak to me, dad," he cried. "It's Dan. Won't you speak to me?"

The old man roused himself with an effort. "Mother found ye, did she?" he said drowsily. "I thought ye'd come when ye heard her a callin'. Ye mustn't run off like that again. It kinder makes us worry, ye know. Good night, sonny. I can't keep awake no longer. Good night."

For a long time Ellis knelt there, his head bowed upon his father's lifeless hand; and when at length he rose and turned to the officers, who stood silent in the shadow, they saw upon his face the peace which knows not fear — nor hope.

A Geometrical Design.*

BY MARY FOOTE ARNOLD.



UR aunt, Miss Ellen Weathersby, lived and died in the Weathersby homestead in Strangetown, which is about fifty miles from the city where we then lived.

At the time of her death Aunt Ellen was old, wealthy, and eccentric; how eccentric we did not fully realize until we had learned, through her will, of the strange conditions which prevented us from at once entering upon our inheritance.

As mother had been quite ill at the time Aunt Ellen died, none of us had attended the funeral. But a week later, when the package arrived containing a copy of the will and Aunt Ellen's letter, mother was well enough to appear at the breakfast table.

Of course, the will received our first attention, Caroline reading it aloud. Like all documents of the kind, it was written in legal form and was properly signed, witnessed, and attested. The paragraphs which especially interested us were as follows: —

"I, Ellen Weathersby, being of sound mind and memory, do will and bequeath my entire estate to that one of my three nieces, named, respectively, Caroline Weathersby, Ellen Ann Weathersby, and Mary Weathersby, daughters of my brother, the late William Weathersby, who shall find the proofs of said estate during the year following the date of my death. Said proofs are in a small iron box, and consist of deeds to my real estate, bonds, mortgages, certificates of stock in various mining and manufacturing concerns, the family jewels, and a sum of gold.

"Furthermore, I will and decree that said nieces with their mother, Mary Ann Weathersby, shall reside, rent free, in my furnished house in Strangetown for one year, beginning with the

*This story received a fifth prize of $100 in THE BLACK CAT prize competition which closed March 31, 1897.

date of my death, in order that my nieces shall have abundant opportunity to search for said proofs in said box. If, at the end of said year, no one of my nieces shall have found such proofs, then Caroline, Ellen Ann, and Mary Weathersby, and their mother, Mary Ann Weathersby, shall move out of my house and relinquish all claim to my estate.

"In such case, a second will made by me, and left with Cyrus Clifford, president of the First National Bank of Strangetown, shall be opened, and my estate settled according to its provisions.

"Furthermore, I decree that the contents of this will shall be known only to my three nieces, their mother, the two witnesses, and the executor herein named, until after the expiration of one year from the date of my death. Otherwise this will shall become null and void, the second will becoming the true will.

"I hereby appoint Cyrus Clifford executor under both wills, he to furnish customary bond."

The explanatory letter, which was addressed to mother, and which accompanied this unique document, was characteristic of Aunt Ellen, showing, as it did, her hatred and distrust of men, her petty economies, and her firm belief that her way was the only way.

Caroline read: —

Dear Sister-in-law: — The time has come when I cannot reasonably expect to live much longer, therefore I have made such disposal of my estate as will enable me to die with a clear conscience and a peaceful heart.

I have made two wills, both of which are held in trust by Cyrus Clifford, whom I selected as executor, because I am convinced that he is too cowardly to be otherwise than upright, he being a prominent Methodist, and afraid to follow those impulses natural to all men.

I have thought of leaving my worldly goods to some noble charity; but after all, "blood is thicker than water," and as I near the end my heart turns to my next of kin. Would they were worthy of my beneficence!

Doubtless you can recall, Mary Ann, that during my annual visits to your home in the past, I have sometimes criticized the methods by which you have brought up your family. It is not all of life to be musical, literary, and society favorites. It pains me to write it, but your daughters have no practical knowledge of ordinary affairs, and, more deplorable yet, none of that good old commodity — sound common sense.

A woman who is not ashamed to use her hands in any honest employment will retain the respect of all right-thinking people. To this end, I once advised you to keep a cow, suggesting that Caroline should do the milking, and thus enable you to add to your narrow income by the sale of the milk.

But no, Caroline must keep her hands in good condition to practise her music; and the other girls had a horror of cows!

Equally trivial was Ellen Ann's excuse, when I suggested that she should collect the remnants which are going to waste in your scrap bags, and piece a quilt with which to eke out your bedding. Ellen Ann was preparing for college, and had to study her Greek and Latin. (I doubt her ability; she is too much like you, Mary Ann, whose book learning was always superficial.)

You may remember, also, that Mary (foolishly nicknamed Molly) once flatly refused to trim the grass borders of the path with sheep shears, though I carefully explained to her that by so doing she would save a laborer's hire, and that "a penny saved is a penny earned." But Mary will never do anything but laugh, and talk, and have a good time.

I could cite other instances, but these are enough to illustrate my point. I forgive my nieces for their past misdoings, and offer them one more chance.

For they are Weathersbys.

The iron box is in a safe place, and will not easily be found, if I know your daughters, and I think I do. However, should one of them be smart enough to find it, the box and all that is in it and pertains to it shall be hers to do with as she pleases.

The hiding place of the box will be marked by a sign. That sign is a circle within a circle.

The key is with Cyrus Clifford, though he does not know the whereabouts of the box it unlocks. No man should be trusted too far.

It is only proper to state that I have deposited a sum of money with an attorney named Otis (who appears honest, though there is no telling — at least, he does not smoke cigarettes), with which he is to pay all insurance and taxes due on my houses and lands, in advance for one year, beginning with the date of my death. He will also collect all rentals pertaining to said houses and lands, and deposit the funds therefrom in the First National Bank with Cyrus Clifford, who will hold them in trust until the expiration of the year.

Mr. Otis and my servant, Amanda Cummins, are the witnesses to the first will. Amanda can be trusted to hold her tongue. I know not about Mr. Otis, he being a man.

No one except my three nieces shall participate in the search, nor shall they receive advice upon the subject from any one.

Good-by to all, and good luck to one of you.

Affectionately,

ELLEN WEATHERSBY.

By the time Caroline had finished reading this frank and ingenuous epistle we were all bordering on that state of mind vulgarly described as being "knocked silly." We were amused, indignant, and disappointed by turns. We stared at one another mistily.

"So my year abroad to study the great masters turns out to be a myth of the first quality," said Caroline, trying to speak lightly.

"And I shall have the pleasure of working my way through college after all," said Ellen Ann, with quivering lip.

I (nicknamed Molly) swallowed something in my throat and burst out: "Girls, we m-must find that box if we h-have to b-bl-ow the h-house up to do it," then broke down completely.

All of which but showed the sad straits we were in, and that each had secretly nourished a hope that Aunt Ellen's will would bring us succor. For if ever there was a family of four dilapidated women in need of money, we were that family.

We moved to Strangetown.

Being young, we soon were more hopeful, and came to regard this queer episode in our lives in the nature of a prolonged lark which might terminate at any minute in something quite splendid. An acute sense of the ridiculous, coupled with our love of mystery, did much to bring about this state of affairs. Then, too, our pride was aroused. It was clearly our duty to disprove Aunt Ellen's accusations, and only when the prize had been found and divided (for, of course, we expected to share it equally) could we feel that this had been done.

The homestead was spacious, comfortable, and well furnished in the fashion of fifty years ago. The grounds surrounding it were large and well kept. Years before we had heard tales of secret drawers and closets in this very house, and of Aunt Ellen's habit of keeping large sums of money concealed in the house and about her person. Already our wits were sharpening and a delightful expectancy pervaded our every action.

One night about a week after our arrival in Strangetown, Ellen Ann and I were awakened by Caroline. She stood at our bedside in her nightgown, a tall candle shedding its rays upon her excited features. "Get up, girls, I've found the sign," she whispered.

Half dazed, we followed her to where an ancient chiffonier stood against the wall. Caroline placed a trembling finger on the quaint carving which embellished its old sides. Sure enough, there, faintly outlined between a dragon's claws, was a circle within a circle!

We became very wide awake, indeed. We had hardly expected to find the treasure so soon, yet here we were just on the verge of its discovery. At first, we thought of calling mother to

share the fun of unearthing it; then concluded that, after all, it would be pleasanter to surprise her with it at the breakfast table. How we worked! We removed drawers, measured partitions, examined corners and peered into crevices. Our teeth chattered with the cold; our heads ached with the excitement. At dawn we crept back to bed with our spirits at zero.

At dinner the next evening we again discovered the sign in the carved legs of the old black walnut table at which we sat. Later, the sign appeared on chairs, bookcases, bureaus, and wardrobes. In fact, nearly every article of furniture in the house seemed to have been carved after the same pattern. We carefully examined each in turn, until we became convinced that no iron box could possibly be hidden within it.

Then we attacked the walls. Two rooms were newly papered, the design being trailing vines festooned in circles, one within the other. We examined every inch of those walls, first with a mallet to detect hollow places, then with a magnifying glass to bring to light otherwise invisible cracks.

After that up came the carpets, some of which were replete with that pattern which now recurred with sickening frequency. Under the carpets and on the board floors were circles painted in dual hues; black within white and red within yellow. We invested in a tool chest and took turns in sawing. We removed sections of the floors and poked long sticks between the joists, listening meanwhile for the sound of clanking iron. This we kept up for a week, then stopped to rest. Old Amanda, who had stayed with us for a song, cleared up the muss, smiling grimly.

The conviction was growing within us that there was method in Aunt Ellen's madness. She had gained one point, — she had made us work at last. Instead of devoting six hours a day to her music, Caroline now practised by fits and starts, and Ellen Ann read Greek only as a diversion. As for me, though my body sometimes lagged, my spirits never did.

The necessity for secrecy about the occupation in which we spent our days sometimes made it awkward for us when the young people of the neighborhood became over-curious. For that reason Mr. Otis, the young attorney who had found favor in Aunt Ellen's eyes, made an especially agreeable companion. For he was in the

secret, and we could talk freely before him. And though he could not advise us, he listened to the recitals of our experiences and the reiterations of our hopes and fears with remarkable fortitude. He was quite handsome, with dark, sympathetic eyes, and a friendly smile. We took to him immediately, and it came to be quite a matter of course that Mr. Otis should appear in our drawing room (or rather, the drawing room which we fondly hoped would some day be ours) several times a week.

I sometimes fancied, though, for all his apparent interest in our one absorbing topic, that somehow Mr. Otis disapproved of it, and even, occasionally, avoided talking about it. At such times he would listen to Caroline's music, or read Browning and Ruskin with Ellen Ann, or even talk nonsense with me.

In this pleasant way winter slipped into spring, and the hiding place of the iron box still remained a mystery. One morning, Ellen Ann appeared before us, her clothing covered with dust, and a zigzag line of soot running from chin to eyebrow.

"The sign is in the cellar; hurry up!" she exclaimed.

We hurried up — and down. There in plain sight, laid on end in the hard cement floor, were two circles of bricks, one within the other. We looked and looked and looked again. To be sure; how blind we had been!

Then three young women who had once refused, respectively, to milk a cow, to piece a quilt, and to cut grass with shears, now took hammer, chisel, crowbar, and spade, and pried up those bricks and dug the earth out from under them. After two days of this, we collapsed and took to our beds.

Before that mother had maintained a position of strict neutrality; she now asserted her authority and said such foolishness must stop. We must use reason or give up the search altogether.

"Mr. Otis called this evening," she added, "and I was forced to invent excuses for you. I was ashamed to give the true reason why none of you could receive him."

Our answer to that was one dismal, triple groan.

However, we received mother's admonitions with becoming meekness and refrained from further research for a time. Meanwhile a judicious use of liniment restored our muscles to their normal condition.

As spring advanced, the crocuses came up in rings of two; the tulips and daffodils followed suit; and circles of lilies of the valley peeped forth from wreaths of fern. In truth, the whole place presented a tantalizing arrangement of circles within circles.

A mania for transplanting seized upon us. More "horticultural atrocities" were perpetrated that summer than were ever dreamed of in Aunt Ellen's philosophy. Old ladies calling on mother remarked that her daughters seemed so fond of gardening, and callow youths looking over the back fence asked our reasons for transplanting asparagus into the pansy bed.

When we found the sign carved into the bark of the different shade trees, and chiseled into the stone foundation of the house (with a hand pointing downward), we realized that Aunt Ellen's sense of humor had been greatly underrated by us. She had evidently spent months, if not years, in preparing this cruel joke. Discouraged and humiliated, we resumed the duties of our former life, which now seemed stale and unprofitable.

About this time life, to me, assumed a singular aspect. I seemed to lose interest in everything, even in the iron box, and liked best of all to sit quite still and look into space. I became absent-minded, lost my appetite, had strange forebodings of some calamity about to befall me, and felt as if I had buried all my friends. Above all, I hated to hear Caroline sing to Mr. Otis. Mother said I had malaria, and gave me quinine, which I swallowed without a murmur, and had visions — which I shall not record. For even I did not recognize the malady which had laid me low.

Mr. Otis, too, seemed changed in some unaccountable way. He no longer chatted with me, but evinced a feverish desire to sing duets with Caroline, or to discuss psychology with Ellen Ann. Yet often when he was in the midst of a song or a discussion, I would find his melancholy eyes fixed upon me with so inscrutable an expression as to send my pulse fluttering high into the nineties. More curious still, he who had hitherto been, apparently, so indifferent to the hiding place of the iron box now became painfully anxious as to its whereabouts. Not a day passed but he asked each of us in turn if we were any nearer the solution of the

mystery. The sickening thought came to me that perhaps he wanted to marry one of my sisters, but waited to see which one should win the prize; then I cast the thought from me. I would not believe that he was so mercenary.

Our year of probation was almost over; only two more days remained. We held a family conclave that morning, and agreed that we might as well abandon the search. That we might break the will did not occur to us; besides, we recognized Aunt Ellen's right to do as she pleased with her own.

That evening Ellen Ann attended a meeting of the Shakespeare Club, and Caroline went to choir rehearsal. Mother kept her room with a nervous headache. (Heartless as it sounds, I shall never cease to be thankful that the poor dear was so ill that night.) I was idly drumming on the piano when who should come but Mr. Otis! I was intensely surprised to see him, but, of course, tried to be polite. I offered him a chair; then we said nothing for several minutes. When at last I looked up, there were those eyes gazing at me with that melancholy expression which I knew so well, and which seemed to read my very soul.

"You have not found the box yet, I suppose?" he asked.

That box again! Like the sting of a whip lash, it brought me to myself.

"Mr. Otis," said I, with great dignity, "to relieve your mind, I will say that we have not found the box, nor do we expect to find it. I, myself, have given up the search. Like Pandora's box, it is more trouble than it is worth."

But my chilling manner seemed only to make him glad. He came to the sofa and sat down beside me.

"Do you mean that, Molly?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Otis," I answered.

"Say 'Oliver,'" said he softly.

I said "Oliver"; his eyes blazed so that I dared not refuse.

Then he took my hand and held it; and out of respect to his mood I did not take it away. Which was quite improper, I know, but what can a girl do when a man acts that way?

"Molly," he again said very softly, "are you sure that you cannot find the box?"

"Yes!" said I, so emphatically that he almost dropped my hand (but not quite).

"Then, Molly, I must tell you that I love you."

With that I looked into his face, our eyes met, and — I really cannot write it.

But we came to a perfect understanding; those strange forebodings and that vague unrest left me, and I became singularly calm. I knew now that life was worth living, box or no box.

It seems that Oliver had loved me from the very first, though he had not intended to tell me so until after the search had ended. For he did not believe we would find the box, and he did not want my family to think he was a fortune hunter. (The very idea!) But finding me alone that evening and the time so nearly up, he threw caution to the winds — and there we were.

Gratitude welled within me that I had been spared the discovery of the box. Then the startling thought came, suppose I had found it! What then? I solemnly propounded this question to Oliver. But before he could reply my sisters came in, and to this day I do not know what his answer would have been.

The next morning mother was still quite miserable, and sent word that she did not wish to be disturbed. The girls came to breakfast with red eyes and an aversion to cheerful subjects of conversation. They realized, poor things, that this was to be the last day in the dear old house. I tried my best to be solemn, too, but the joy within would bubble up.

An hour after breakfast I slipped out to take a walk towards the business part of the town. I said that I wanted to buy some thread, then tried to feel sorry as I thought of the time coming when even thread would be considered a luxury by my family.

To buy the thread I was obliged to pass a certain office; of course I did not dream of seeing Oliver, and to preclude such a possibility I kept on the opposite side of the street. But when I got just opposite the office, I timidly raised my eyes to see the place where my beloved passed so many hours each day.

There I saw something which first turned me to stone, and then

sent the blood racing through my veins like mad. This is what I saw painted in gold above the office door: —

I dashed across the street, flew up the steps, and fell like a whirlwind upon Oliver Otis, attorney at law, seated at his desk.

"Give me the iron box," I gasped.

Oliver went white, then red. Without a word he rose, twisted the knob to the great safe, took out the iron box, and placed it in my hands. It was so heavy that I let it slide to the floor, then I sat down upon it, and seizing Oliver Otis's hand, kissed it, to his utter confusion, and the amusement of the office boy.

Oliver lifted me to my feet, and putting me into a chair, explained how Aunt Ellen had insisted upon leaving the box in his care; and how, though objecting, he finally gave in. Also, how sorry he became when he got to know us and realized the injustice being done to us; for then he was bound by the conditions of the will, and was obliged to let events shape our futures.

Which they did to my entire satisfaction.

. . . . . .

The second will? Everything was to go towards founding an institution for the Discipline of Refractory Children. The document was even more awe inspiring than the first one, with whereases and wherefores to throw to the birds; a sad waste of red tape, in my opinion.

Yes, Caroline is going abroad with mother, Ellen Ann is going to college, and I am going to be married.

And we all hope to live long and happily.